

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“Whose Children Are We?”
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Whose child are you? That sounds like a simple question, but may be one of the most important ones we can every ask of someone, or ask of ourselves. Sometimes it is rather easy to see whose child someone is. E.g., I recall years ago Elena and I were visiting someone in the hospital— Shirley DeBlanc— and when we walked into the hospital room the doctor was talking to Shirley with his back to us, and so we stood aside to wait for their conversation to stop. While the doctor was talking with his back to us Elena could hear the inflection of his voice and turned to me and said, “He is part of the Finney family!” The Finneys are my sister’s inlaws. I said there is no way she could tell that-- and I did not even know if they had other doctors in their family than the one I knew. Then the doctor turned around and, sure enough, he had the name “Finney” on his coat. Elena said to him, “You’re a Finney!” And he said yes, and that he was a cousin of my brother-in-law— and I had never heard of his name before! E.g., the Archie Manning family has three sons who followed in the same footsteps as the father— Cooper, Peyton, and Eli. The oldest, Cooper, had to stop playing college football due to a medical condition, but he has a son named Arch who plays for Newman High School and doing very well. It is always interesting to see children following in the patterns of their parents. So, whose child are you? Whose child am I? Jesus’ words in our passage today will help us to re-visit this question.

READ John 12:27-36a (pp. 106-107)

CONTEXT: Jesus was visited by some Greeks who wanted to speak to Him. The world is coming to Jesus, much to the Jewish religious leaders' chagrin (v 19). Jesus points His disciples to His upcoming crucifixion, and challenges them not to love their lives on earth and thus lose it, but to hate their lives on earth so as to gain eternal life. It is now that Jesus again addresses His upcoming death.

READ vv 27-29. "As Jesus addressed His own death, we see His human side revealed, for He felt troubled/terror; nevertheless, Jesus desired ultimately His Father's glory, and thus received the Father's affirmation. Cf. Mark 14:32-35; Luke 22:41-44." The verb used here to describe how Jesus felt, *ταράσσω*, expresses a deeply felt emotion. READ 13:21; 14:1. New Testament scholar Don Carson states, "The verb is a strong one, and signifies revulsion, horror, anxiety, agitation. . ." (*John*, p. 440). We are reminded in Mark 13:32-36 Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemene before He is arrested asks that the cup be removed from Him, if possible. In Luke 22:41-44 Jesus in the Garden is said to sweat drops of blood, though the manuscript evidence reveals this may not have been an original part of Luke. It was a very difficult time for Him, and shows His human side as the incarnate Son of God, doesn't it? E.g., I am reminded of the Archbishop of El Salvador in the late 1970s to 1980, who spoke out against the injustices in El Salvador and knew he angered the government's right-wing death squads and he knew he was their target; one night he thought he heard something suspicious, and he immediately left his dwelling in his bedclothes and ran outside in great fear and hid himself; after whatever sound it was left, he went back to his bed in relief. He knew the fear that following Jesus meant He might be in trouble. Later he was assassinated during a worship service. E.g., I recall reading about the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. early during his civil rights work as a minister he had experienced some violence—I believe his house was shot, but fortunately did not hit anyone inside the house—and he was up at night and had a cup of coffee and

sat at the kitchen table by himself brooding over his predicament. If he continues this civil rights work, it could indeed, perhaps would definitely, get him killed. So, was he willing to continue with his work, even at that cost. He finally decided that he would. And of course it did cost him his life in 1968. Romero and King were ministers of the gospel, following the crucified Messiah. E.g., I recall another minister in the 1950s in Bulgaria, a Communist country after World War II, who did not toe the party line, but preached the gospel; one night the pastor had some men knock on his door and take him away, and the family did not see him again until at least 10 years. Jesus is at the point of His ministry where He is in Jerusalem for the last time, for Passover, and His death is near. But Jesus comes to terms with this and wants the Father's name to be glorified. The Father's voice resounds from the heavens and responds affirmatively to Jesus, and the crowd hears it but does not know what to make of it. I love the idea of Jesus wanting the Father's name glorified in His death. E.g., I have heard of a Christian, I cannot remember who, saying that in his death or her death the desire is that Jesus would be glorified. That is a great prayer for us, is it not? That when our time comes, people would see Jesus glorified in the way we die— that despite our fears, which are natural, we would have the calm conviction and confidence from the Lord and that Jesus would be glorified in it.

READ vv 30-33. Jesus sees the Father's voice sounding for their benefit at the solemnity of what He is saying, but that does not necessarily mean it wasn't also for Jesus' benefit. "Jesus saw at least three things accomplished in His death: judgment of this world, judgment of Satan, and salvation of this world. Cf. 3:19-21; 14:30; 12:20-21." The judgment of the world is not only a judgment of people who reject Jesus; READ 3:19-21. But it is also the judgment of human sin that wins people's salvation, that redeems them— after all, Jesus in 1:29 the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The ruler of this world, or Satan, is cast outside and is defeated, and Jesus draws all people to Himself in salvation. This is

not a proclamation of universalism, that all people are saved— v 25 makes clear that people who love their lives will lose them. Rather, Jesus is saying He will draw all people to Himself, regardless of whether Jew or Greek, especially since the Greeks are coming to Him in v 20. Unfortunately the Christian Church has often showed preferences for certain races and show disdain for other races. E.g., I recall a church in Louisiana in the 1990s had a gardener from a different race, and the church would not let the gardener use their bathroom. And of course there are wonderful expressions of Christians loving and caring for people of other races. E.g., I think of the U.S. Supreme Court justice Amy Coney Barrett, who is from the New Orleans area, has adopted children from another race.

READ vv 34-36. “Jesus emphasized His temporary time on earth, so His hearers needed to be sure to be children of light, not children of darkness. Cf. 1:3-4; 9:4-5; Matthew 5:14-16.” The text literally says in v 36 “sons of darkness” (υιοὶ φωτὸς γένησθε), the translation in the NRSV is surely right, “children of light”; the intention is inclusive. I want to ask you, what is stronger— light or darkness? We may think initially they are both pretty much opposites, so they are equal to each other in strength. But that is not so. Darkness cannot pierce light, but light can pierce darkness. Jesus often uses the imagery of light and darkness, and He says He is the light of the world (9:5) and His followers are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). E.g., I recall I went on a short-term mission trip in 1986, and I travelled inland to Ghana, and the ministry team with whom I was travelled to a remote, rural town at night, and when we got there there was no electricity. It was weird, because I had never been in a town with no electricity, no lights. People were walking down the road, and I could barely make them out. Finally someone came with light, and that made all the difference to what I could see! That is what it is like to walk through life without Jesus. We are in the dark, and we don’t know where to go, how to live, in any meaningful way when compared to the light that Jesus gives our lives. E.g., I recall a woman I knew

who was not following the Lord and was nice, but not interested in spiritual things really at all and really just living life for the things of this world, and then she started to search spiritually and she read the Bible and her eyes were opened and it was an amazing transformation in her character and her priorities!

“What type of children are you and I?” Are you walking in darkness and a child of darkness, or are you walking in the light, and a child of the light? We are invited to come to His light, and then to shed His light to others so they will no longer walk in darkness.